

Hyacinth in Chains

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For my chosen family.

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Introduction

A poem is the form which formlessness takes. A word is formless, is phoneme, is a distillation of non-sense. Meaning is experienced, and it's ever-shifting as a word is contextualized and recontextualized—by others' voices, which are always in conversation with your voice, attempting to make sense together of the alienation and fracture of experiencing a self. Poetry is playful work. It dances in the margins, in the liminal space that exists between binaries. It is my body: constantly reformed, twisted, contorted, made ugly, made beautiful, made meaningful.

Hyacinth in Chains attempts to create a poetic space that can imagine a synthesis between the grammars that structure our communicative bodies and all the spaces where our bodies do and don't exist (or exist in parts, as mangled wholes, as fractures imposed by the 'real' world, the world of dreams, the digital world; in the relationships between how we create a self and how that self is interpreted and regulated externally). It encompasses the pain and wonder of queerness, of transness, and sees these concepts not as dualities or binaries, but as a radical mode of existing in the unnamed spaces where we don't exist, yet are always living.

The world is not some entity separate from the body, and it is not an extension of the body. In being experienced, in all its contradiction, the world is a part of the body, as inseparable as whatever you might call the soul, the heart, the conscience. Its horrible ironies — its contortions and contradictions — its grotesque and beautiful shapes (and its

beautifully grotesque, and grotesquely beautiful shapes) — its tenderness and wonder — its unfathomable horror — exist as much in the body, which is poetry.

Hyacinth in Chains is organized into three sections: i. “bruised flesh,” ii. “disaster poetry,” and iii. “DOOM OIL.” The poems of each section are unified by theme, and each section contextualizes, recontextualizes, builds upon, and reimagines the other two in its individual form, style, and content. “bruised flesh” focuses on themes of family, poverty, spirituality, queer desire, language, and nostalgia. The poems that make up “disaster poetry” carry over many of these same themes, but are more experimental in both form and content, reconsidering and reimagining the perspectives of the first section. “DOOM OIL” synthesizes the approaches and themes of the first two sections, playing with formal constraints and experimental syntax. The language and imagery of these poems moves, over the course of the collection, from the grotesquely beautiful toward radical tenderness and prayer. The poems are constantly in conversation with one another, challenging one another’s perspectives, sometimes quite literally.

The mutable nature of poetry and ideas, constantly reshaping one another, is a central concern of this collection. Conversations take place in all time-directions: there is no “forward” movement to *Hyacinth in Chains*. Rather, the collection is intentionally atemporal, understanding time as a position that constantly informs itself. The three sections that comprise the work are only distinct in the sense that the poems contained within them are written with unifying intent. The work is ongoing, has been finished, will be started.

As my voice is in conversation with yours (and yours with mine in kind), so is mine with the voices of others, and yours with them as well. Sometimes these conversations are playful — sometimes they are bitter — sometimes they are violent. Usually they are all of these. The conversations with violence this book is having are, I think, explicit, in that the poem contains that violence, and converses with it. I am in a different conversation with the poets whose voices have asked me to write. Their voices nestle against my own. Sometimes they sound like the same voice; sometimes I hear something in them, and move away from it, or else I move toward. Mary Oliver, I am often moving toward, though just

as often away. I hear “October” most when I talk with Mary Oliver: “One morning / the fox came down the hill, glittering and confident, / and didn’t see me—and I thought: / so this is the world. / I’m not in it. / It is beautiful.” When I talk with Wendy Xu, I hear: “A lot can go wrong / if you sleep or think, but the trees go on waving / their broken little hands.” W.S. Merwin: “The earth is slow, but deep, and good for hiding: / I would have used it if I had understood / [...] and yet how one small / Death, however reckoned, is hard to dispose of.”

A poem is the shape of formlessness, and so takes form in the body, which is poetry. These words, from the voices of others — and so many more words, so many other voices — are constantly taking shape in my body. I will not say if shape and form are the same thing.

Instead, here is a story. Apollo loved a boy, and his name was Hyacinth. Others loved Hyacinth; the wind loved Hyacinth. Hyacinth and Apollo played together. Apollo, to impress his lover, threw a discus so high it slit the clouds; and Hyacinth, wanting to impress in kind, ran behind him to catch it. The discus hit the ground and bounced back, killing him.

Here is another story: Apollo loved a boy, and his name was Hyacinth. Others loved Hyacinth; the wind loved Hyacinth. Hyacinth and Apollo played together. Apollo, to impress his lover, threw a discus so high it slit the clouds; and Hyacinth, wanting to impress in kind, ran behind him to catch it. The wind, who loved Hyacinth, blew the discus off course so that it hit the ground and bounced back, killing him.

These stories contradict. They are both true. Neither of them are true. Hyacinth exists somewhere in that contradiction. Caught between interpretation, between meaning.

I don’t like these stories, so here is one more: Apollo loved a boy, and his name was Hyacinth. Others loved Hyacinth; the wind loved Hyacinth. Hyacinth and Apollo played together. Apollo, to impress his lover, threw a discus so high it slit the clouds; and Hyacinth, wanting to impress in kind, ran behind him to catch it. The wind, who loved Hyacinth, blew the discus into his arms.

A word is formless, but it isn't helpless. A word might be chained to form, but a chain has room to move: it can stretch, and contort, and layer over itself, and knot. It can be tied around another. And a chain, of course, can be broken.

“bruised flesh”

We Had A Great Stay

The world keeps spinning
beneath the orange skies and pine needles
winded daffodils the world keeps spinning

against the ocean of robin redbreasts
Red-tailed falcon swooping down
for the squirrel the world keeps spinning

No matter how many times the trees
collapse on power lines across the road,
No matter how short I cut my hair

or whether I really loved you
or felt anything that deeply, whether
I felt anything at all, or if the sidewalks

where the buckling wind carried howls
of church bells and stripped tree bark
on whatever street was St. Sylvia

with the luminous pines or were they
oaks? And if there were even cicadas
that year the world keeps spinning,

I never pause to steal a second
glance into the kvetching maw
of the things I have lost,

rather say I've lost
nothing the world keeps spinning
around nothing, around nothing

and cry out *Can anybody hear me?*
Imagine some voice *I do, child* the world keeps
spinning though it was never constant more like

the fog swirled around the mountains
nestled in its arms dissolved
by the sun eight minutes the world

keeps spinning for all its blue skies, really

it's not so much about loss anymore
is it, there's always more

oil, another 200 years, a valley
in which Rip Van Winkle sleeps and
never wakes the world keeps spinning

and from above in the autumn
the trees beside the Hudson Bridge
like a fishhook my father tosses

himself off the world keeps spinning
no matter how much is lost,
the cat never comes back,

My father is dead and I still want
his almanac with the days it rained
the world keeps spinning and spirals

Earth's mantle wide like a musketball
in Harris' cornfield leveled by war
reenactments where we shot off

the fireworks, the red skies
the warning light, the apocalyptic
non-sequiturs the world keeps

spinning even as it tenses, rears back
and weeps for God and all the wasted
time the world keeps spinning, a kid

again in the autumn drizzle, in Red Hook,
spinning until I'm dizzy and the parade
is going by and it's Thanksgiving,

then it's Christmas the world keeps
spinning even as the stars blink out
and the ground falls out from beneath

our feet, all our dances just trying
to get warm, now the warmth rising
like steam off asphalt every summer

you took the world keeps spinning

against my will, no matter how many times
I tell myself it's a bad dream it's over

this is the morning, I wish I could stop looking
for signs and wonders, for Flex Mentallo
in the jawline of every Luke Skywalker-

looking twink the world
keeps spinning and first it's the
JC Penney and then the high school

atrium I want to float above myself
and then the UFOs, CD-ROMs, LEDs,
really I wanted so badly to believe

but all that's left is two cans of sweetcorn in the pantry,
somebody I really should have fallen in love with
if only I hadn't been so exhausted, a motel marquee that reads

WE HAD A GREAT STAY
EVERYONE WAS FRIENDLY
AND WELCOMING,

The laughter of my old friends
bubbling up like reflux in my throat.

In Thin Air

It's Field Day again.
The leaves careen like Challenger,
in thin air, and gore the blue
track gold through the fog.
You squirm with rotting Cheerios.

You forgot your gymshorts.
Who pulled the dream from you?
The stars worm into seagulls
and split their fledgling wings,
scouring the Cape for carrion.

Coach mouths skyward:
*I don't want to claim
anyone's love.*

The Body Betrays You

This city has gapped teeth and I'm between
them, my back against one marble fang.
I've walked through museums without reading
the signs on the exhibits, I've walked down stairs
without looking down once. Without looking down once.
The jaw of this city will eventually swing shut.
I mean like krill sucked into the mouth
of a baleen whale. Shut without opening.

I am choking myself on myself.

The body betrays you. It calls
what you don't call desire desire,
sustains attention long as the
bladder's empty, confuses the dream
with the blind-slanted moment of waking.
A moment changes shape the second
it's remembered, and you really gotta focus
to remember how it happened. Without feeling.

Whoever's at my door better swallow me whole.

Careful what you call embodied,
if you're giving body to the bodiless;
if you tell lies and the body betrays you.
What do you mean to say with your breath?
I don't want to want but I want to want you.
Time stretches tender new skin
over lesions millimeters deep and crosses
its fingers we don't pick the scab off this time.

And time eludes us, lest we pay it forward.

Opportunity

chunky bird on the wire, come in
little bird, window's open, yellow bird
come in, come in
let the sparrow to his screeching
and the flying ants to die in pools of sugar

the crow tells you, don't trust
the chirruping cat or conditioned breeze
he says come back, the window
will close chunky bird, yellow bird
come back, come back

when you are but feathers
come in, come in
and let the sparrow to his wailing
and the flying ants to fuck and drop their wings
and the crow to cry wolf don't listen come in

The Wind

Blow me suggests that I am the wind:
pressure wanting stillness moves, and you
are something rigid enough to sway.

This being a career for the wind,
work done to weeds. A dandelion
parting the grass, scattering its seed.

Esoterica

Something is following me.
 Sometimes I open a door
 and there's just another room, and sometimes
 it should be the backyard but it's lexical darkness
 and I can feel it stirring. The stars I can see but there's
 something between them, something massive, something
 with amble fingers. Feeling along the ridges of timelines.
 It will find me eventually. It leaves me notes. It asks me
 to define *door*, and I write back: *something you slide notes under*.
 It shows me rooms I haven't seen. It makes me feel small.
 It makes its nest of language and the deeper it sleeps,
 the more difficult it becomes to *articulate* I am at a loss
 for words, wandering what's left of the Hudson Valley
 to forage fresh image-food. It asks for *room*
 knowing I can't give it that. Instead I give it *home*.
 It chews on that for awhile. They tore down the old
 auditorium, so when I open the door I expect the darkness
 but instead I see the blue room. I sit second chair.
 I play the trombone. I've forgotten the fingerings.
 The beast helps me with my scales. It remembers
 what my muscles don't: *ligature, pianissimo, with feeling*.
 We work our way through Night on Bald Mountain.
 The poem will not break. The poem will not break.
 I feed the darkness music but it wants more words.
 There's a note under my door this morning: define *memory*.
 I write back: *the process of telling a lie*. Then I open the door
 and the darkness yawns: DEFINE GUEST. I have to think about that.
 "Guest is someone who drinks your coffee and knows they have to leave."
 Then the fingers run through my hair. I remember every person
 who asked can I touch your hair I wish I had hair like yours
 is it natural did you get it from your mother or your father
 what *are* you?
 The beast does not ask about my hair.
 It just runs preadamite fingers through my timeline.
 It says, HOW DO YOU TAKE YOUR COFFEE.
 I reply, "*room* is where I come to you."

Flowers in Moonlight

are just unnatural. Especially white flowers,
which is why I stomp the morning glory

whenever I notice the buds uncurling.
I'm thinking about being buried alive,

being half-buried, here in the khaki field,
just my legs gnawed by the night-bugs

I find beneath the river stones. What
ran through this field—lovers, rivers,

maybe foundation—nibbles my toes.
The stars turn and it's making me sick.

God, if you're looking to write a song,
compose in the key of a car alarm.

Standing Next to a Tree That Lasts in Winter

I.

We move backwards through the scriptures
and the universe feels swollen, like the squirrel carcass
I found by the road last week after Sunday school.
I'm standing next to a tree that lasts in winter.

II.

I keep dreaming about locusts. October comes
and withers, we move through Exodus and I feel
extradited. We'll leave when Mom stops talking.
I'm standing next to a tree that lasts in winter.

III.

Isaac makes sense, but I'm stuck on Job.
My father's been researching UFOs.
I talk to God more the less I believe in God.
I'm standing next to a tree that lasts in winter.

IV.

The first week of Advent, Mom reads us Genesis
from Grandma's bible. A pressed leaf falls out.
I think it was maple. I thought you'd live forever.
I'm standing next to a tree that lasts in winter.

Dorothy

Somebody is tapping their heels
together in the hallway one, two,
three times and it's concrete
and I'm crushed, somebody else
please take my place at the altar

and I will give the gift of life, Lamb
in the place of Abel's blood on Cain's tongue,
the sweet, sweet honey of a high school kiss
that is between the Lord and I, banging
the same rhythm on the timpani,

one, two, three times *there's no place like home*
and I won't go back there, there is a lightsaber
tucked under my armpit, for all intents
and purposes through my chest,
my sweet Cain bashing my head in with a rock,

such *devotion*, such love as siblings
seldom give, and maybe God's watching
Cain uprooting wild onions and comprehends
for the first time what He meant by *innocence*.

Millennium

'99 was the glitch.
The world soft-reset
what should have been fatal
error, and webs of glitches
spool on memories of a childhood
that maybe happened or didn't,
like say, a Dutchess County Fair teddy
bear twice my size crossing the stairwell
I saw it! It doubled back
to look at me! I swallowed a penny.
Heads up. Or like the kitten when she turned
surfaceless, cylindrical, lemon-white, black-robed.
Things like that. Impossible things. I remember Y2K
even if I can't, events are viral, they spread
like a Drudge Report headline, proto-clickbait,
across a ThinkPad bogged with adware
and no Norton immune system.
Early that decade Earth hadn't shot
the house on Deer Run; now it's turned
over twice and Google shows strangers' cars
parked outside, and a decimated forest.
Now words get tangled up in my thumbs,
and though they tried the Maricis couldn't teach
me the cat's cradle. I really shouldn't be
surprised when my voice glitches and
whole decades get caught in my throat.
I probably should have started smoking
when the tens began. Glitch is the sound
of failure, and if you've been listening,
you should already hear it.

Now and Then

*No water for horses,
not in this weather*

commiserant

your rainbow back arcs
against a bailing sky
I can't even ask you this,
decked as I am in coveralls

the conch shell drones the ocean
and I know it's just white noise

but I can taste it,
so what makes it real?
splayed out in this field
of wicked-tooth daffodils,
those sly grins,
skin soft as condoms,
my face pressed on your fist

smoking, as it were, clove cigarettes
because I keep my promises some

I search the clouds for horses
and when it gets dark, I search the ground

Outrageous Glory

In the musk-thickets, we are just like deer
devouring cardamom, dreaming of wonderful spices.
A man approaches, thick with debt
like he's just stepped from the dust of collections,
moving like an eviction notice—summer hangs
pungent and semen once more, before it finally
heaves inward, groans ecstatically, and I am dimly aware
this is over. We are broke again. It's November. I'm thinking
about repression—trying not to think—trying not to
panic—like a wild deer—I know these boots
I got on credit might someday leave me homeless.
I see you waiting like a carrion-feeder, you must be
humongous, to keep all that poverty down,
if I could gorge myself so empty I would retch.
Maybe in California I can drive to California.
If, at the end of my life, I find myself in Spokane,
and in Spokane, in the company of friends, let's drive
down to the redwoods. We putter like electric kettles.

I'll brew us a strong pot of cardamom tea,
and we can talk this thing through.

The Hayloft

deciduous forest
decadent, decayed

your veins
cracking tendrils

thawed
stream
bed

i bite down hard,
taste metal

hope it runs like
melted copper melted
caramel

carve our initials
in the chestnut trees

(the ones marked
with pink ticker tape)

the trail is lost
or whatever

pretend you
haven't forgot

the resonant consonance
stands in solidarity with
the pain that vowel insists

was always there

(i was always scared
of you, just sometimes

)

i grew fangs

bit my lips

resonance,
an echo

in the field where
the pink ticker tape blew

where the chestnuts
once stood, proud

turned, walked away

when once I asked for sunlight

When once I woke entangled in shade

light moves pleated through the pokeberries

And let the dishes soak till they vinegar'd

awash the guiding hand of light is love

There's no lightning-soup, I'm sorry, just being—

the way that things have always been

Now it's just the way you remember them

the stream still runs, defiant of life less love

What the heron I met when I was less a virgin

light still running through that stream, love

Would have made of the way I loved?

in the last dream, I am sitting on a couch

across a dark bar, waiting for your shift to end.

Reciting the Shema to Myself in the Tomato Garden on Christmas Eve

Today I am listening to *War of the Worlds* again,
thinking about the street-sweeper outside the Eckerd
in the Bronx I washed every Wednesday who told me
Every Wednesday the leaves be falling from the
trees soon the ends of times is near.

I am old now. There are weeds in the garden
of my life. The sky's my olive branch, and you
are the child I would have slain on the mountain,
because I knew you'd understand. If only to be
star-footed again! The trees in the woods
in the yard are not nearly so dense as you thought,
child, you must have known, I took you down
the mountain on a sled in the trees through the woods—
Today is Thanksgiving and I'm gone fishing.
I know you are thankful that I'm dead, and that
you would have killed me if you had the chance,
and if you had a chance to say you loved me again,
so am I.

“disaster poetry”

evering: “symptoms of space”

*Love surrounds you, darling,
spoke the woodpecker to his son:
Greys are humans too, smooth and
wretched and mouthless and
indistinguishable.*

You will feel yourself at times a triangle
caught in left space where there's only words
and soft feelings that emanate from bodies in space.
Bodies touching words. Bodies touching words
with their mouths. Mouths touching bodies.
Three mouths, two are speaking, one is touching
words with their bodies. Two mouths are speaking
but one mouth is silent. Three mouths are moving,
one mouth is speaking, one mouth is breathing,
one mouth is fucking.

A tripod on two legs.
That's one consequence
of walking on this earth.

Another is to love things that fly.
You love what doesn't feel gravity.

Spoke the woodpecker: *in artifice
comes creation, and from creation
structure, and artifice from structure.
And you worry which came first.
Things really aren't so different as you think.
These are all things in left space.*

*In right space, there is a hole thousands
of times the size of our Sun:
that hole is what becomes of humans
who introduce themselves to each other.
Who see each other synonyms.*

You love things that fly. You love what doesn't
feel gravity. You do not understand yourself.
Tell me, darling, how you feel about fate?

I feel like love
is a weightless thing I don't want
to feel this way about love

evering: “the turkey vulture looks at you the way fishhooks
look to the eyes of fishes”

for aimee

Delicatessen is a loanword, paraphrased from
the baleful lips of delicate chickens.

Look there, cried Jeff, *A man who knows*
his own worth. And pulls the head from a dove.

I didn't read *Animal Farm*. It wasn't assigned.
A robin landed on the porch with a broken wing

this summer. I was afraid to touch it, anything
delicate injured or dead.

The possum from my throat drew the voice of a friend:
spoke on the sweetness of rot, then never spoke again.

evering: “here is a brook that knows the taste of menthols”

As it's written in Deuteronomy:
Any viscous or snowcapped place
rips itself apart with footprints.
The Lord's or whatever. My footprints

beside yours in the snow of your life
become mine in two handprints
when I bring you to your knees. A trail
snakes into the woods I drag and leave

your body. This is the path of serpents:
on your belly you shall feel no hunger
, only the pain of hunger.

The Smell of My Son is the Good Smell of the Field

Before the world there was water
and God knew that, and God was ashamed.
And when any time had passed, the land
was before the water, and that was how God
intended. NEVER AGAIN THE COVENANT
it was said, ALL LIFE WILL BE DESTROYED
BY WATERS OF A FLOOD. But God's a
heartbreaker. Today I woke in a sparrow's nest
and ate the eggs I mashed in slumber.

March

Nothing stays the same, but it's not so bad.
I get to watch the sunrise. I get to feel it set.
When we were young and so inspired, we could
have brought life into the world. We still do,
but it feels different. I water the plants
when I remember. I set food out for the cat.
He doesn't let me forget. But the moon, the trees ...
We wring our silence into this world,
and it responds in kind.

Coquina Imagines Herself at the Mercy of Camus

I've got my tongue in the sand again,
like Sisyphus, digging myself a hole,
just to be unburied over and over.
I'd rather be split open and
have my insides licked clean.

From an Olive Tree in Gethsemane

The last of the unspoken worlds
have been called to silence.
The undulating muzzled phrases
tightly wound around the moon
move from room to room
whispering, "Do you want to stay here?"
In the bedrock — *Eloi* — the morning sun
— *sabacthani* — nestles on my pillow
like a dying cat finds a place to hide
and blameless shapes herself twitching
in the mousetrap dreams of
her slow, patient life. Sunshine
the color of piss on bedsheets
piss-colored, in a bluesky room,
trapped beneath the filmic skysurface.
Why does it smell like catalogues in here?
The wafer-weight of Body,
the seasick weight of Blood:
forget about this world
and it comes undone.

The Birds

I.

The last light of morning locks the door
 on its way out. Several half-shadows move
 through the house. The thermostat coughs
 like a sputtering pianist
 practices her scales. Life moves
 lifelessly about the space. Life is
 packing up the rest of its possessions.
 Life is getting ready to move out;
 afternoon will move into its room.
 The cardinals are brown. The bluejays are brown.

II.

The dinner bell rings. Dad mows the lawn.
 Dad edges. Foxgloves spit dip into
 the grass clippings. They are weeds,
 like soccer players. The rabbits and
 ghost-hens trellis the sidewalk.
 The sidewalk turns to brick, then gravel.
 The asphalt cracks itself smooth.
 Are the chickadees gray? Are the flamingos gray?

III.

You paint the house green. It falls face-first
 into a lemon grove. The house paints itself
 orange, and you call this home. You live
 in someone else's home. You don't own
 your own life. The birds only sing
 in the colors they're told.

IV.

You have to wake up now. This is silly.
 How are you not yet tired of sleeping?
 Haven't you noticed the insects
 that crawl inside your open mouth?
 Your shadow does the dishes.
 The warbler crones. Its mouth is closed.

The raven is black. The crow is black.

V.

Night descends like an elbow on this place.
Can you feel your foundation settling?
The self is fragmented, so the self
colonizes. The seagull sobs.
Some birds live underground.
Some birds die there.

VI.

For the birds. Whatever I said,
I really did intend to love you.
Life needs help moving into the new place.
Afternoon breaks the bay window
and changes the locks, but you
sleep through it. You're used
to shattering. You don't hear the birds.

VII.

The cardinal is red. The bluejay is blue.

The House of Flickering Love

Go, and I will enter there,
the leek-black hollows worn by the
years,
wormed into wormwood,
buried in the backyard,
yearned for and misunderstood.

Go, and I'll catch up with you,
on the neurotic shores of
unconcern,
where always a lantern burns
in the window forgotten,
fallow and flickering.

Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and Whatever's On After That

We kissed in the kitchen but never the TV room,
wrote stories when we were kids and took
pictures when we grew up, that is: the world was huge
and we wanted to make it bigger—then it was
too big so we framed it. White-winged in our
white sheets, I make up dreams to share
should you wake up, ghost-white as you are.

I have never seen the turkey pardoned.
This year the spread is white meat, dry.
I wonder *where is my family?* Out loud:
“Today I am thankful for my family.”
Today I am starving myself.
The red knights' crest on the play-castle
I play-pretend's our family crest, a serpent-lion
dancing around itself, pawing at butterflies.

This morning always comes open.
I want to say like a window but coming down
on you, the sound of glass shattering
just before the sound of shattering glass.
The future is the poem you're working,
the past is a photograph, and the present is
picking your nose. I'm dreaming of you,
my world, your family crest, it's just me now,
watching the parade and not speaking.

“DOOM OIL”

Before June Seventh: “The Deterioration Puzzle”

1.

Contragrammatical monster! Parenthetical syntactic soup! I am the fibrous tendons of language! The sky is frenetic phonemes and this is silly! What am I doing here! I want the rudiments, I want whatever fractures of linguistics have their tenuous grip on my throat, the throats of those I love, the torn-out throats of those without voice for love.

I want to hear I want to speak I want my language back I want to take it from you and give it back with tenderness and care. If we had a voice in the first place, it's moaning: *You are hearing this voice and you are hearing that it's yours, to manipulate, to critique, to constrain, to deteriorate with rhetoric, to decimate with definition, and the voice is a glottal punch, the full embodiment of so much pain and joy and love, outrageous glory! I'm starving, when is dinner again?*

Give me a rule so there's a box from which I can free myself, since I do after all [want to be free], and there is no freedom in reaction; yet there's no possibility of a decontextualized world; yet I want to imagine it—

2.

I want so much for myself, but I'm only a moment clear. When I say *Night on Bald Mountain* think *practice*, when I say *practice* think *performance*. Think *liquid* when you think *lucid*. There are veins in reality, and there's a puncturing, and there's a withdrawal. *Seed* means *potential*, and *potential* means *abundance of content*. I lost the third grade spelling bee when I misspelled *etymology*, and I *deserved* it [think *entitlement*]. I am thinking *form*, and you are thinking *body*, when you mean *composure*. You say *what shape*, I say *that's not what I meant*.

When I say *work*, think *fatigue*.
There are shadows that cast on shadows.
Watch where you're walking.
Pay attention.

3.

What a horrible thing I've done,
trying to make something as old once,
perform as something else. There is nothing
new in the moving dreams, just more boxes,
this time when I'm in the basement (and I
am lucid) I can see the space more clearly:
Here is the stone corridor where your
father jumps out of the empty cinder
room; here is a door I haven't seen.
Oh, yes, I came down here for the prop door.
For the film we are making. Didn't I?
No.... I came down here first to move the boxes
where the brown mushrooms are growing
into the guest house where it is damp
but at least it's not flooding. Did we talk about this?

I need a map of our house's dream corridors.
There are so many families still living here.
I need a colorwheel for when the landlord
paints the house in dreamcolors; I have no
palette for this! and the vines , for which
I have no fresh metaphor but find fresh
comfort in the creeping darkness; I am
losing track of the puzzle. If you have a riddle,
deliver it! I will answer.

In A Blue (Variations on a field)

In the last field of tinsel-corn,
before the crater at the world's edge,
where the moon curls up every morning
in the fetal position and clicks its jaw
until it settles on a dream

In the last field of tinsel-corn,
we rode past on our bikes in gloam
dark-clothed and reflectorless,
crossing ourselves when we passed
that roadside cross

In the last field of tinsel-corn,
before the hungry tractors
lay waste to the wasted ears,
and clods of aerated soil
stand like insect mausoleums

In the last field of tinsel-corn,
beside the black roadwaters
where a squirrel squirms,
spewing iron water
into the safe deep ditchbanks

In the last field of tinsel-corn
my toes make conversation,
standing in a crop formation
trembling, straining
to feel you brush my hair.

St. John in the Wilderness

*I now see my task much more simply,
as the discernment and living out of my
vocations: figuring out how God is calling
me to love and then pouring myself out
into that love.*

— Eve Tushnet

1.

Before they caught us, we danced in the parish yard
nine times, hipbones dividing shadows like schisms,
a glass of red wine—I hate red wine—in my hand.
I have seen the altar staged and the altar broken down;
seen the black bears crouched in the kudzu pining
for garbage cans brimming with dank Catholic trash;
can tell You what shape a woman's lips take
when she wants to kiss a man, and when she doesn't.
Just once more, I want to be pushed over and devoured
like garbage, and pick plastic bags from the hyacinth
with her. My *Yom ha-Din*, I don't know what love is, but
I can guess: for St. Augustine heard, when they buried
John, the earth over his grave still heaved.

2.

Last night I suffered greatly in a dream.
Did You see me, finger-deep in red earth,
digging holes for hyacinth I'll never plant?
I wanted the earth to tremble, and it did.
Like kudzu swaying in the wind, or
the voice of Elohim crying in the wilderness.
And I was not ashamed at her coming.
I am most myself beneath her, tearing up
the earth as though it can be filled.

3.

Sometimes I too crouch amongst the kudzu,
holding my boyish hips, "I've Been Loving You

Too Long” hyacinthine against the memory of love.
Though You have me, You cannot have my private
sabbaths. I carry this small-chested boything over
the cedar-pine and cypress threshold, over the
heaving earth, and into the wilderness.

Eclipse at Idiots' Mouth

I can't tell you much about this,
and what I can tell you is wrong, but
a bat with bioluminescent goop in its mouth
looks like a lighting-bug. No it doesn't.

I don't know what a reflection is, but it's not
the same as a photograph, so I am
a reflection if I'm not a photograph.
In any other lifetime, I would have made

a great pogo stick. The moon takes
up the same arc-minutes as the sun,
but it's different, and probably not

because you can look at it.
That was a great show. We couldn't see
anything for awhile.

○

The sun passed. We thought about it.

Watching a Squirrel Pulverized by the Passage of an Electrical Current Through Its Body After Chewing Through a Power Line Decompose Over the Course of Several Months

1.

I wanted to call you. It was dark-noon.

I was rubbing the blood off my razor.

Early that summer, a tree collapsed.

I have been without power before.

We had a generator then.

Don't lecture me about correlation.

Don't lecture me about power.

I have been without power before.

2.

I have weeped over the bodies of unknown things,
but never before collected their bones.

It's hard to see a corpse and not think
it belongs to you. I took vertebrae. Pieces of jaw.
Synecdochal stuff. I say: this is the squirrel
who knocked out the power grid. The lineman
says this happens all the time. In Schenectady
my birth certificate is filed. There's an open
staircase at that courthouse. Big enough
for a girl's body to slip through.

3.

How can a squirrel
fall
artificially

into power

The song goes: *I need
you more than
want you*

4.

Here is what's left:

Pulverized wood
I mistook for spine

Blood [on my face,
on the body]

Seventy dollars
I will never call to ask for

Two vertebrae
A piece of jaw

A tree that's gone
A body that's gone

I'm Thinking of You. It's October

I don't want to remember the first
time, fertilized in early November,
so far from finding a home in my body.
*I would rather be anywhere else, I thought, but
I'm glad I'm here, in the pines, and I can hear
your thickets thick with toads, and pretend
your body is mine, and I am home.*

'I see no life with you, who can't believe
in God, with your honeycomb heart
and mouth full of hair. Nobody's home:
won't you come over?' I need your proboscis
in my throat to draw out the pollen-words —
the family-words — the words that make me
productive — for I am barren. A pitcher-plant.
A saccharine promise. A god-eater.

Saying It

My heart is divided into many birdsongs,

and I am hearing my name tasted

and I am not wanting to be devoured

I am wanting to be told

this is your name thank you

i love you say it back

I am saying it in a dream

on your neck in beetle-tusks

I am shaping the words in mouth

when I retell the fairytale where you untie

the ribbon from my neck but I leave out

the specifics I am saying it

Rainbow Passage

When the sunlight strikes raindrops in the air,
ask me for the definitions. I am, after all,
but a half-named creature, phantom
resemblance, subjective and deviant,
mirror-not-woman-not-real-thing.
Used in a sentence: "That's your name?"
In a room rimmed with eyes, I am defined
out of existence. A body innominate
is a division of white light into many
carcasses, left in wantless caverns
of collapsing microflora, so many I's,
so much time "grounded in science,"
or else in the ground. Where is my body?
People look but no one ever finds it.
Grim world, world-on-stilts, rope-walker
with its path high above, and its two ends
tethered to chromosomes, ask me
for the definitions. You sunshine animal,
you meaning-maker, ask not
what I am called. Ask me for the definitions.
I should know fully, since I have been fully known.
There is, according to legend, a boiling pot
(or whatever you call it) where unseen
echolocators grieve their molten names.
Please, ask me for the definitions.
They act like a prism and form a rainbow,
but I've walked alone at night enough
to know that light's a prison. If I remain unfound,
bury me nameless, beneath my work, for the ghost-gods.

After Stackhouse

With You

All ends begun

At the trailhead

the lungs of the forest,
A breath of attrition

[*Abrasion, under its strictest
definition, is commonly confused*

with attrition]

The fennel in square knots
Glistering obsidian

Silence colored dry-mush

The ground, wounded, huddled together

When the oceans were purple
and the sky thicket-moss green

The cedars run through it
And stand on stilted heads

flat against a flat-Washington dawn

I'm seeing things

The railyard innards

Asleep at the Omega Motel

There is a difference

Filtering light through your skin

I want to be the color you love

Moss-thick, nectar-person

The slimy deep
water opens

There is a path

We are walking

Adiantum-haired
In the cedar-cold

With you

The Body Redeemed: “DOOM OIL”

Again, the body is found at the dark outposts
 by the tracks, and I rediscover time eludes us.
 “The world is latticework,” you say, and mean
 it. But holy shit, that’s stupid. Implying space for us.
 Had we but world enough. Time is a resource,
 which makes it precious. But I waited so long
 for you to love me back. I’m not ashamed.
 That time was mine, and I used it wisely.

Judge not that you be not judged

I’ll take the body on my tongue. It tastes
 sanctimonious when it’s in my hands.
 I want to be humble before you, sweet Jesus,
 my first and final boyfriend, for I’ve devoured
 you, which means we are married, like it or not.
 Seriously, though—I’m trying to remember
 what it was like. To take part in human flesh.
 All that’s coming up is something like Wonder bread.

Who knows what’s good or bad

Today, caution is advised. Take care: there’s no room
 for mistakes. Let’s talk about body again—
 body as vessel for the spirit, body as walking carcass.
 The body may not be you, but you’re defined by the body.
 Caution is advised. Take care. There’s no room for mistakes.
 Keep your fluids to yourself. Time will make short work
 of all that your body provides. You are not long for this world.
 All you’ve got is time.

But don’t forget the bodiless, wanting for a body

The Seedroom

After language, what remains?
Once the seed of language is cleaved
from the sonorous tree it once contained;

Once wet sand leaves its leaves
pickled; once you have forgotten
scheme, its tincture will dissolve

all you once found rotten.
The clock-hand long passed
recompense; the overwritten

poem shirks form because it's bored,
or because it went to the dark fields
of memory to recall. Sacred words

blossom into dreamworlds,
saying things like *are you listening?*
That's good. To write is to build

precarious nests, strong
in the sense of twigs and pine-needles,
component, breathless, unwilling.

The poem is: wrought of conditionals.
Is: a never-ending sip of the Big.
Is: traveling through tunnels

that ancient language-voles dug
and filled with dried chrysanthemum.
Go somewhere early, somewhere fog

touches itself to the fuse of your genome,
and touch yourself there. This is painful work,
admittedly, but don't allow yourself to come

to conclusions. As you walk,
consider the trees.